

Wheelchair Accessibility: Simulation

Est. Time: 1.5 Hours

Objective

Better understand the challenges an individual who requires a wheelchair for mobility might experience and the possible accommodations that can address these challenges.

Overview

Individuals who use wheelchairs often experience challenges, or barriers, related to independently accessing the environment. As such, many parts of their daily routine require adaptation or adjustment. Teachers can better anticipate and address these challenges if they have experienced them firsthand or have close contact with individuals who have.

Activity (for College Courses)

Borrow several wheelchairs from a local hospital or medical center. Split the students into teams and ask them to explore the campus. One important rule for teams is that they cannot “curb jump” but rather must use designated curb cuts in order to reach their destinations. Each team should attempt at least two of the following:

1. Check out a book from the library.
2. Go to the campus cafeteria, purchase something to eat in the dining area.
3. Use the restroom, making sure to wash your hands before leaving the lavatory.
4. Explore one of the multistory buildings on campus. Identify the best and worst options for entering and exiting it.
5. Go to one of the campus computer labs. Using one of the computers, check out the IRIS Center Website (<http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu>).
6. Travel from class to the instructor’s office.

Activity (for Professional Development Settings)

Note: Activities may need to be modified if professional development activities are not conducted at a school site.

Borrow several wheelchairs from a local hospital or medical center. Split teachers into teams and ask them to explore their school. Each team should attempt at least three of the following:

- Enter the school from the bus drop-off point and go to a designated class. Sit at a student desk and take notes from the board.
- Go through the cafeteria line. When you have your tray, sit at a table and eat.
- Use the restroom. Be sure to wash your hands before leaving the lavatory.
- Drink from the water fountain.

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- Look up a book in the library's catalog system. Locate that book and check it out.
- Go to the playground and play five minutes of four-square, basketball, or softball. Take note of what other activities you can do on the playground.
- (For middle- or high school settings) Leave your homeroom, move to your locker, and then go to a designated second-period class within the allotted time for passing periods.

Discussion Topics

1. What were some of the things that were most difficult for you?
2. Were there any situations that were easier than you expected? Please describe them.
3. What unexpected situations did you encounter?
4. What solutions did you come up with for challenging situations?
5. How were members of your team able to help you?
6. Having completed this activity, what are some things that you will now keep in mind?